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ABSTRACT

This guide was designed, in form and content, with adults in mind, but anyone can use it to study Vermont history as a living subject that includes, affects, and involves everyone. The guide aims to stimulate historical awareness, develop readers' interest in the past and the present, and make them aware of their interaction in the processes of continuity and change using the journal, "Historic Roots," as a place to start an exploration of the past. Teachers can use this guide to enhance their students' sense of connection, and perhaps to stimulate their search for more knowledge about what has come before. Seeing history as the context within which individuals live their lives can help students open their minds to new information and new perspectives, developing analytical and practical skills as they explore their own connections to past and present. Activities in the guide are organized into three sections: (1) "Bringing the Past into the Present"; (2) "Using Maps and Graphics to Make History Live"; and (3) "Thinking about History." All of the guide's activities contain some of the same elements, all use different skills, but there should be some kind of reinforcement, through written assignments, discussion, or drawing to involve students. Some of the guide's activities can be done in the classroom; for others, where practical, the teacher may want to suggest a field trip to sites of interest or the local library. (BT)

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USING HISTORIC ROOTS

A Teacher's Guide

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Ann E. Cooper

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BY ANN E. COOPER

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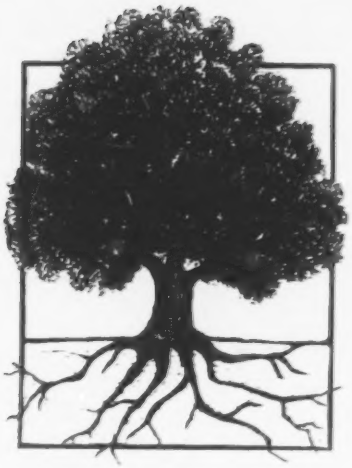

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USING HISTORIC ROOTS: A TEACHER'S GUIDE

In this country history has had a bad rap. All too often people think of it as dry lists of names and dates—stuff to memorize that has no relevance to the world today. Some of this may be put down to poor teaching, but most of it is simply misconception. *Historic Roots*' purpose is to introduce new readers to history—in this case Vermont history—as a living subject that includes, affects, and involves everyone: everyone who ever lived, everyone who is living now.

The magazine was designed, in form and content, with adults in mind, but clearly anyone can use it. We hope it will stimulate historical awareness, develop readers' interest in the past and the present, and make them aware of their interaction in the processes of continuity and change. To be without such a sense of history is to be without a sense of one's own place in the world, like finding yourself in a forest with no distinguishing features. You can't see the sun or the stars, and you have no idea of how you got there or where "there" is. You are isolated, without a sense of connection to the rest of the world.

You, as teachers, can enhance this sense of connection and in some students perhaps stimulate a search for more knowledge about what has come before.

Metaphor can be useful in creating a sense of connection with history. In the magazine we have used a tree, with the present and the beginnings of the future in the upper branches and new growth. These are sustained by and nourished through the trunk, which is fed and held, in turn, by roots deep in the ground. You can also describe history as paths through the woods, some wandering off into the trees or petering out or ending abruptly at rivers or cliffs, others leading eventually to where we are now. History can be viewed as a river, an ocean, a skyscraper, a picture puzzle, anything that creates interest and helps mitigate the tendency to see history as irrelevant and boring.

An organic view of history that includes everyone and everything will help your students understand that they too are a part of history and have a history of their own. Seeing history as the context within which we live our lives can help students open their minds to new information and new perspectives, developing analytical and practical skills as they explore their own connections to the past and to the present.

You don't need to be a historian or a history teacher to make this happen. Your own love of learning, your imagination, and your sense of the possible, along with your interest in people, are what brought you to teaching and are all you need to use *Historic Roots* effectively.

Anything that piques your students' interest can be a gateway to historical interest and awareness. *Historic Roots* is not a textbook; it is a place to start an exploration of the past through articles on interesting and sometimes offbeat subjects. This manual is not a "how to" book either. We hope that by suggesting activities and trains of thought we will stimulate your own ideas and help you create your own ways to reach your students, whether you teach a class or tutor individuals.

There is almost nothing that is not grist for the historic mill. You know what will interest your students and what resources are available in your towns. We hope you will use this

booklet as the starting point in creating enthusiasm and activities that will engage your students and help them, by exploring the history of whatever interests them, to root themselves more firmly in the present. The "Rooting Around" section at the end of each article of the magazine will give you some ways to think about this process. Here are a few more.

Two useful books, one specifically about Vermont, the other more generic, are Elaine Wrisley Reed, *Helping Your Child Learn History* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Development, 1993), available from the US Department of Education and from the National Council for History Education, Inc., 26915 Westwood Road, Suite B-2, Westlake, Ohio 44145-4656; and Gregory Sharrow, ed., *Many Cultures, One People: A Multicultural Handbook about Vermont for Teachers* (Middlebury, VT: The Vermont Folklife Center, 1992). Both were written for people dealing with children, but the concepts they use and the activities they suggest are good ways to start thinking about creating historical awareness and connection in adults as well. Both contain detailed bibliographies.

The activities in this manual are organized into three sections: Bringing the Past into the Present; Using Maps and Graphics to make History Live; and Thinking about History. All contain some of the same elements, all use different skills. You can use them as is or can create your own. It is important, though, that they not be done in a vacuum, that there be some kind of reinforcement, through written assignments, discussion, drawing, that will directly involve and intrigue your students. Some of the activities can be done in the classroom; for others, where practical, you may want to suggest a field trip to sites of interest or the local library.

BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

This kind of activity uses materials found locally to encourage a sense of history as a flow of change and continuity within the nation, the community, and one's own family. It also helps develop interpretive and analytical skills and can stimulate interest in learning more about the past.

Use of Old Objects

Almost anything old will do: old coins, old photographs, pictures of old flags, old clothing, old kitchens, old vehicles.

For Instance:

Take an **old coin**—a "wheat" penny, a pre-Roosevelt dime, 1941 pennies, old nickels and quarters. First help the students figure out how old it is. Is it younger or older than they? If younger, then ask them how old they were when it was made. Can they tell you something that occurred in their life around the time the coin was minted—about family or siblings or where they lived? What or who is pictured on the coin? Why? What are the differences or similarities between these old coins and newer ones?

Flags are a vivid means of creating awareness of the country's growth and change. See if you can find a picture of an old flag—any flag before there were 50 states—pictures of flags in World War II, for instance. What do the stars and stripes mean? How many states were in the union when that flag was used? Which states hadn't been admitted yet? When did they come in? How do states come into the union? When did Vermont? An interested student might branch out from such an exercise and want to learn more about earlier flags or the Revolution, or might want to go to the library to find and/or draw pictures of the different flags we have had in our history.

Photographs can also make the past immediate, particularly photographs of your own community. Most town libraries and historical societies have good collections. Ask your students to point out or find out what has changed since the photographs were taken. What has stayed the same? What can they tell from the photographs about the ways life then was different from life now? Even looking at car makes and models can lead to a discussion about methods of transportation and how developing technology has changed not just the way we travel but the way we live.

From the Delano Collection of the Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vermont

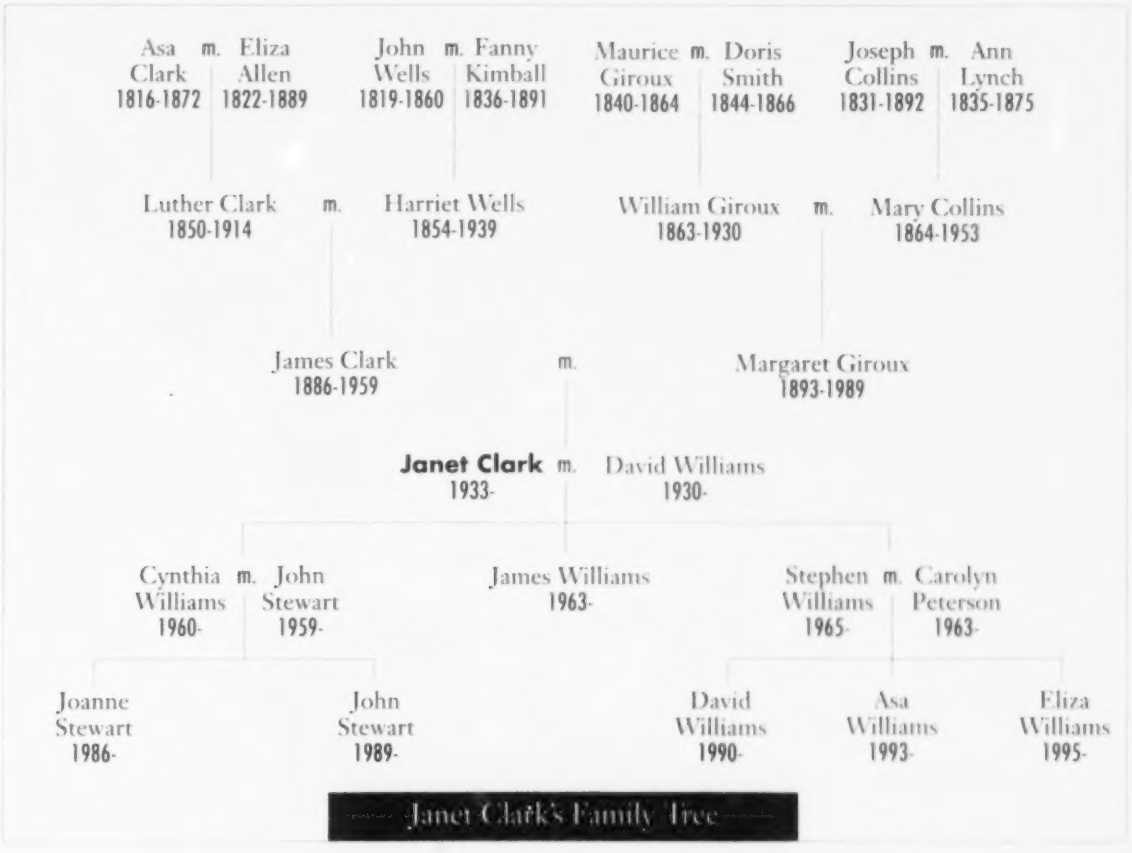
Because they could not move at all while the photographer took the picture, the man and the woman look as stiff and cold as the man's wooden hand. We don't know who they are or exactly when the picture was taken, but there is a lot to think about in this picture. What can we tell about these people? They are in a studio. She is very young. He has only one hand. Their clothes tell us the picture was taken in the 1890s. It is what we don't know that makes it so interesting. Who are they? Where did they live? Why were they having their picture taken? What else did they do that day? And what on earth happened to his hand?

Photographs of people and building interiors can also elicit a sense of change and continuity, helping students who are interested and able to start to draw conclusions about how life was lived in a different era. What limitations do long dresses put on women? What must they have felt like in the summer? What does not having electricity mean, not just in terms of cooking and lighting, but in terms of communication and entertainment—no phones, no movies, no television? Students might find it interesting to compare what it takes to prepare a meal in a fireplace or on a woodstove with the same process using more modern appliances. Students who use woodstoves for cooking and for heat might, if you present it carefully, be able to establish an immediate connection with the realities of life as their ancestors lived it.

The Community and the Family

Use your community resources . Ask your students to go look at **old buildings** in town. Help them to find out when were they built, out of what material, and by whom? What were they used for? Has the use changed? The appearance? What do local **monuments** and **plaques** commemorate? Encourage students—or, if possible and desirable, take them—to visit local **archeological sites**. Why do people dig for history? What happened at this place? What has been found? What do we learn from this site? Why is it important? What other things have people learned from archeology? You might want to tell them about the discovery of Troy or about the Indian ruins found under New York City skyscrapers.

Family trees are a good visual way to trace family history. (See page 7.)


Asa Clark 1816-1872 m. Eliza Allen 1822-1889
John Wells 1819-1860 m. Fanny Kimball 1836-1891
Maurice Giroux 1840-1864 m. Doris Smith 1844-1866
Joseph Collins 1831-1892 m. Ann Lynch 1835-1875
Luther Clark 1850-1914 m. Harriet Wells 1854-1939
William Giroux 1863-1930 m. Mary Collins 1864-1953
James Clark 1886-1959 m. Margaret Giroux 1893-1989
Janet Clark 1933- m. David Williams 1930-
Cynthia Williams 1960- m. John Stewart 1959-
James Williams 1963-
Stephen Williams 1965- m. Carolyn Peterson 1963-
Joanne Stewart 1986-
John Stewart 1989-
David Williams 1990-
Asa Williams 1993-
Eliza Williams 1995-

Janet Clark's Family Tree

Local historical societies and museums are rich sources of artifacts and information. If one is near you, perhaps you could visit it with your students or encourage them to go and report back on what caught their eye. If not, public libraries often have good local history sections and exhibits that would serve as well. The Hardwick (Vermont) Historical Society recently mounted an exhibition of its collection of old photographs for which school children did all the research. Might your historical society be interested in a similar project using your students to do the necessary investigations?

Holidays are good times for historical inquiry. What does the holiday commemorate? How is it celebrated? Who celebrates it? Students in Bennington County might be interested to know, on Bennington Battle Day, that the battle itself actually took place somewhere else. They might want to learn more about the part played by Vermont in the American Revolution. Columbus Day can stimulate discussion not just of the age of exploration but of the anger it creates in some blacks and Native Americans.

Family History

Their own background can help some students develop an interest in the past. Where did their family come from? When? Why? Do your students have photographs of their parents or grandparents? Any baptismal certificates, old clothing, family artifacts? Look at these together, if possible, helping students see how much historical information they contain.

Maps and Graphics

Some students respond more positively to graphics than to words. We have already talked about the uses of photographs. Maps and timelines and, in some cases, family trees can also stimulate discussion and sharpen skills.

Maps, in addition to their obvious practical use in finding one's way around, can help establish a geographical context for students' lives. You may want to use maps to locate your town, the town(s) where relatives live, the place(s) students' families came from. You can also use maps to locate the museums and other places mentioned in articles in *Historic Roots*.

It is important to explain and demonstrate scale when working with maps. Compare a large road map of the state to the maps showing Vermont on page 6. What's the difference? See if your students can find Vermont on a globe or on a map of the hemisphere. Discuss what kind of scale they would have to use if they were making a map of the room or the town or the way to where they live.

A discussion of scale can lead into one of distance. How far away is the Shelburne Museum, which is featured in the first issue of *Historic Roots*? How would they get there? How far away are the towns where students' families live, the places from which they came? What would be the best route there now? How long would it take? How long would it have taken in the past—by horse, on foot, by train, by bicycle, even by earlier car?

A **timeline** is an interesting way to map a student's life—or part of it. The one on pages 8 and 9 shows important dates in Arthur Jones' life along with some of what was happening in the larger world at the time. It is not necessary to pick events of global or cosmic importance for a timeline—Joe Dimaggio's hitting streak, the first color tv, the first landing on the moon, anything your student is interested in will help put his/her life in the context of the times. A look at who was president might also help widen perspective and stimulate interest in the wider world.

Vermont by County

Maps like these provide a good demonstration of scale as well as some idea of Vermont's size. (Reprinted by permission of the Vermont Folklife Center, Middlebury, VT.)

Canada, The US, Central America

The following books are helpful in creating timelines; hopefully at least one of them will be in your public library.

Bernard Ceren, *The Timetables of History* (Newark: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

Philip L. Cottrel, *Events: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

William L. Langer, ed., *An Encyclopedia of World History* (London: George G. Harrap, 1972). This has wonderful family trees also, some going on for pages.

James Trager, *The People's Chronology: A Year-by-Year Record of Human Events from Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992).

Bruce Wettran, *The New York Public Library Book of Chronologies* (New York: Stonesong Press, 1990). This is organized by subject.

For students with knowledge of or interest in family history, a **family tree** is a good visual way of tracing the past—raising questions while eliciting information. Page 8 of the May 1995 issue of *Historic Roots* has a four-generation family tree with Janet Clark at the head. The family tree on page 4 of this guide shows six generations of her family.

How far back can your students go with any part of their family? What happens if instead of starting with themselves at the top they start with their oldest known ancestor(s)? Younger students may find themselves at the bottom of such a tree, older ones in the middle, leading perhaps to discussion about generations and maybe even about the complexities of cousinly relationships.

THINKING ABOUT HISTORY

It is important to be able to see history as the context of our own lives. We have already seen how old photographs, old objects and structures, and maps and graphics can create a sense of connection with the past and stimulate analytical thought. They can also create interest in learning more about those times.

For some students a newspaper picture showing the VJ Day celebration in Rutland might provoke questions about World War II. What was it about? When did it happen? Who were the Allies? Who were the Axis? What can they tell from just this knowledge about how the world has changed? Who are our friends now? Who our "enemies"? What makes another country a friend or an opponent? A movie about Robin Hood or Babe Ruth or JFK might open other avenues of inquiry. Keep your eye on the local television listings.

Students who are interested and able may want to move from the concrete to the more abstract, from stories of events and descriptions of past life to questions of how we know what we know. What causes change? Are change and progress the same thing? How do we know what "really" happened?

The question of historic truth is an important one that goes beyond the geographical location of a battle. How *do* we learn what happened? How "true" is history?

One morning in a high school history class, the teacher announced a pop quiz and asked the class to take out pencils and paper. At that moment another student walked in and, when asked why he was late, created such a scene that the teacher told him to leave. As soon he had gone the teacher asked the rest of the class to write a description of what had just happened. The argument had been staged, and the students learned from their

Timeline for Arthur Jones

A timeline of Arthur Jones' life to date. Timelines help students connect their lives to what is happening elsewhere--to history.

widely differing reported versions that even eyewitnesses to an event have difficulty in agreeing on exactly what happened, that because their own perspective influences what they see and how they report it, even eyewitness reports of an event are to some extent unreliable.

This is an important concept, even for students who are just beginning to turn to the written word for entertainment and knowledge, and one that is best learned through demonstration. If you are teaching a class, as opposed to tutoring an individual, and do not wish to stage an event, you might ask the students to watch a certain program on television, write down a brief account of it, and then compare the accounts in class. The quality of writing is not important; the content is what matters. Reports written directly after an event, uninfluenced by others' views, are best for this purpose, as they limit the inclination to be influenced by someone else's point of view. It can also be instructive to ask students to report on the same event some time later and see how time, as well as perspective, alters memory.

Some students find the idea that there is no absolute historical truth beyond such things as dates and rulers difficult to accept, but for others such a notion can provide an opportunity to go beyond fact and deal with the concepts of abstraction and interpretation. Learning the influence of individual perspective on historical memory and interpretation can also create connection by making students aware of how their own actions impact on the lives of others—friends, family, the community.

Finally, students themselves are a good source of **historical memory**. Conversations with someone much older or someone from a different country or culture can bring students new outlooks as well as new knowledge. So can looking back on their own lives and writing or telling about an event that was meaningful to them. Such exercises call upon all of the skills we have highlighted here and can provide new avenues for insight and exploration.

We hope you will encourage students to write down what and how they learn about themselves, their families, their community and to make maps and timelines that help create a stronger awareness of who and where they are in the context of their family history and the community's. We hope to be able to publish some of these in future issues of *Historic Roots*, for the history of Vermont, like all of history, is an amalgam. It is the story of everything that has happened to everyone who has lived here. We don't know it all; we can't. But every bit we do know adds to and enriches the whole. By encouraging your students to write to and for us, as well as for themselves, you will help expand their horizons and ours.

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